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**April 8, 2005****Federal land funds gets second look**BY SAMANTHA YOUNG  
PVT WASHINGTON BUREAU

WASHINGTON - Western lawmakers on Wednesday renewed a demand that the Bush administration and Congress boost payments to counties that host federal land.

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Congress has fallen short of approving the full \$350 million authorized for county reimbursements known as the Payment in Lieu of Taxes program.

The Bush administration's fiscal 2006 budget proposes a \$26 million cut in payments to counties, slashing funding to 2001 levels, lawmakers said.

At a news conference highlighting the issue, Rep. Jim Gibbons, R-Nev., said Nevada since 1995 has missed out on an estimated \$68 million in federal payments, which cash-strapped rural governments rely on to pay for schools, fire and police services and other government functions.

Nye County, with roughly 98 percent of its 18,400 square miles under the management of one federal entity or another, has been severely impacted by the Bush administration cuts.

"No matter which administration, it seems OMB has always used PILT as a fund with which they had discretion to either fund or not fund," Gibbons said, referring to the White House budget office. "It's gotten to the point where much of the West has felt the pain."

This year, Cannon said western lawmakers are better organized to win the votes needed to get the distribution of \$350 million to an estimated 1,900 communities that neighbor public land.

In Nevada, the federal government owns 86 percent of the land, according to an analysis by the Bureau of Land Management. The state's counties received \$13.4 million last year from PILT compared to \$6.4 million in 1995.

Interior Secretary Gale Norton has defended the proposed cut as necessary in tight budget times. She said last month that the Bush administration has boosted the program's funding by at least 60 percent since the 1990s.

Cannon said the government should tap money allotted for federal land acquisition and Environmental Protection Agency grants, two programs strongly defended by Democrats and moderate Republicans.

Doug McMurdo contributed to this story.

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April 7, 2005

## Salazar brothers push PILT reform

**By Joe Hanel**

Herald Washington Correspondent

WASHINGTON - Nobody pays property taxes on national forests, which leaves many Colorado counties scraping for money.

A coalition of liberal and conservative House members came together Wednesday to put their support behind bills sponsored by the Salazar brothers - Ken Salazar in the Senate and John Salazar in the House - that would guarantee payments every year to counties with large tracts of federal land.

Reps. Salazar, D-Colo., and Mark Udall, D-Colo., introduced a bill in February to guarantee full funding for the program, called Payments in Lieu of Taxes, or PILT. On Tuesday, they got a public show of support from members of the Western Caucus, a group of conservative Republicans.

"The 3rd Congressional District receives more than \$11 million in PILT payments, money that is needed to support local schools and fire departments," Salazar said. "Rural counties should not have to fight every time to get the money they were promised."

Congress has usually under-funded the program, but payments have been rising in recent years. The federal government sends the payments because federal lands create costs for counties. Mesa Verde National Park, for example, creates heavy tourist traffic on area roads.

Last year, La Plata County received \$536,000 in PILT money. Archuleta County received \$522,000, and Montezuma took in \$413,000.

The budget Bush proposed in February calls for 12 percent cuts to PILT. Cuts may vary in different counties, because payments are based on a complex formula that takes into account population and acres of public land. La Plata and Montezuma counties stand to lose around \$60,000 each under the Bush budget.

Under the Udall-Salazar bill, money would go straight from the U.S. Treasury to the PILT program every year, bypassing Congress and its political whims. Sen. Salazar is sponsoring a similar bill in the Senate.

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**BYLINE:** By CHRISTOPHER SMITH, Associated Press Writer

**DATELINE:** BOISE, Idaho

**BODY:**

Unless the federal government boosts local reimbursement for lost tax revenue on public lands, some western lawmakers want to give Uncle Sam's property to the affected counties.

"If the government can't be a good neighbor, it has no business being in the neighborhood," U.S. Rep. C.L. "Butch" Otter, R-Idaho, said after introducing his bill this week to increase spending on the federal "Payment-in-Lieu-of-Taxes" (PILT) program.

Under a 1976 law, cash payments are made by the U.S. Department of Interior to compensate local governments for tax-exempt federal land. The money, intended to offset losses to the private property tax base, is generally used by counties to pay for firefighting, law enforcement, schools and other services.

Western lawmakers have long chafed that rural communities with large tracts of federal land have not received the amount of money they're due under the law. During a news conference on Capitol Hill on Wednesday, a bipartisan group of western members of Congress claimed that over the last decade, rural communities have been shortchanged \$1.1 billion.

"Either give our counties in the West the land or fully fund PILT to try and make up for it," said Rep. Rob Bishop, R-Utah.

Environmentalists and western land policy experts say it's unlikely a Republican-dominated Congress would increase funding for a program President Bush wants to cut.

"We agree some counties have an unfair financial burden because they contain an overwhelming amount of federal land, but there's no need to make ridiculous proposals," said Sean Cosgrove of the Sierra Club's Washington, D.C., legislative office.

Others figure the idea isn't that far-fetched.

"The idea is to finally get the land back on the tax rolls," said Idaho Association of Counties Director Dan Chadwick. "I'm not sure it's going to ever happen, but we appreciate the shot across the bow."

Otter's legislation, co-sponsored by fellow Idaho Republican Rep. Mike Simpson, would give counties parcels of federal land equal in value to the difference between the PILT payments appropriated by Congress and the full amount authorized by law. National parks, wilderness areas and federal wildlife refuges would be exempt from the conveyances.

"But your favorite fishing hole, your family camping spot and that place you got the six-point bull elk is all up for grabs under this bill," said Linn Kincannon of the Idaho Conservation League.

Another PILT reform bill, sponsored by Rep. Mark Udall, D-Colo., would up spending levels but wouldn't convey federal lands to counties.

"Any suggestion of transferring land is going to be resisted," said John Freemuth at the Andrus Center for Public Policy at Boise State University. "But higher funding for PILT is something that local county commissioners, school boards and environmental groups seem to agree on, even if the Bush administration is not helping matters much."

President Bush's budget for the next fiscal year seeks to cut PILT funding to less than \$200 million, down from the \$224 million that Congress appropriated for the current year. The Western Caucus, a coalition representing GOP members of the U.S. House from western states, says funding the program to the extent authorized by law would cost \$331 million.

**Las Vegas Review Journal**

**April 7, 2005**

## **Lawmakers demand payments**

[STEPHENS WASHINGTON BUREAU](#)

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